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ABSTRACT

To determine the relationship of the expressed reading interests of fourth grade students to their free selection library book choices, 12 boys and 9 girls were administered an interest category inventory and recorded their free selection choices on a special record sheet. Analysis of the data revealed a moderately positive correlation between free choice selections and expressed reading interests. (Author/FL)

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THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE EXPRESSED READING INTERESTS OF FOURTH GRADE STUDENTS TO THEIR FREE SELECTION LIBRARY BOOK CHOICES

by

Linda E. Messina

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to determine the relationship of the expressed reading interests of fourth grade students to their free selection library book choices. The sample of twelve boys and nine girls were administered an Interest Category Inventory and recorded free selection choices on a special record sheet. Analysis of data revealed a moderately positive correlation of .54, significant at the .01 level of confidence, between free choice and free choice in agreement with expressed interest. Individual tables for the expressed interest and free selection choice categories of boys, girls, and total group are also included.

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ARTICLE I

> Guidance rests upon the principle that what the child likes he will read. What is needed, then, is to know his reading likes. The value of knowing the child's reading likes is the insight which such knowledge gives into what he will read with interest and enjoyment. (Weekes, 1935: 15)

In essence, Weekes directs attention to the fact that reading interests play an important role in the reading experiences of the child.

As defined by Landy (1977:20), an interest in reading is "any disposition which impels an individual to seek opportunities and sources to read. The reader will seek to read in certain areas of interest rather than in others." Robinson (1973:81) considers reading interests of children "to be those topics and materials which children actively choose to read."

Reading interests have been the subjects of research since before the turn of the century (Carter, 1976:2) with the first known study in 1893 by M. B. C. True when he reported "What My Pupils Read". The bulk of reading interest research was conducted prior to 1950 (Carter, 1976:1) and H. Alan Robinson (1974:3) notes that prior to 1960 over three hundred investigations of reading preferences were published, largely in the United States. Reading interest research is still a topic of study today, however Robinson (1974) notes

that the surge of studies has decreased.

Carter (1976:2) comments that "despite the discussion of individual uniqueness in interests, these studies have emphasized the commonalities of children on the basis of group categories." The group categories noted are "age, grade level, intelligence, sex, cultural, socioeconomic, and ethnic influences." Spache (1974:1) lists significant primary factors affecting children's preferences for books as "the environmental and psychological elements of the child's age, sex, cultural background, and motives for reading." Despite the non-manipulative nature of these primary factors, Spache (1974:1) notes other important factors to be considered which are able to be modified by teachers to promote and stimulate reading. They are the accessibility of books, teacher attitudes and demands, and classroom reading practices. Noted is the definite need for awareness on the part of the teacher to student reading interests. Alexander (1976:1) also views consideration of student interests as important in "positive attitude development and maintanance."

There have been various techniques employed to determine and identify the reading interests of children. Among them are forced choice, personal interviews and questionaires, written logs, diaries, inventories, records of library books choices, requests for lists of favorites and recall of favorite story titles. (Robinson and Weintraub, 1973:82) The utilization of these varying techniques is viewed by Carter (1976:1) as impeding the process of generalizing from

one reading interest study to another, however she notes the interview/questionaire as the "most prevalent tool used in assessing interests today." Weintraub's survey (Weintraub in Groff, 1970:652) cautions that "findings are to a large extent influenced by the particular research technique employed." Ashley's study (1970:1088) states that "reading interests cannot be effectively studied without reference to reading dislikes" and that"fitting the book to the child" cannot be done unless interests and dislikes are known. (Ashley, 1970:1096) He also notes that too much reliance is placed on past studies of interests (1970:1095), hence the implication for the need of further studies of reading interests specific to the group.

Statement of the Problem

With consideration of past research findings and implications and to provide additional insight and information concerning reading interests, it was the purpose of this study to determine the relationship of the expressed reading interests of fourth grade students to their free selection library book choices utilizing both a reading Interest Category Inventory noting likes and dislikes and a tabulation of library book choices.

Significance of the Problem

A study of this nature should be of significance to the teacher in helping to guide student reading experiences and making them more pleasurable. Enabling the teacher to

match the student to the literature he reads will be of great value if it is possible for teachers to actually determine student book choices based on their stated reading interests.

Hypothesis

It was hypothesized that there exists a relationship between the expressed reading interests of fourth grade students and their free selection library book choices. It was further hypothesized that by ascertaining students' stated reading interest categories it would thereby be possible to help guide recreational reading experiences.

Definitions

Expressed reading interests are defined as the categories of reading that the students will state as their preferences determined through Interest Category Inventory responses.

Categories of reading are defined as Adventure stories, Animal stories, Books About Other Lands, Fables and Fairy Tales, Famous People, Fiction, History, Hobbies, Humor, Jobs, Mysteries, Poetry, Science and Nature, Science Fiction, Series books, and Sports.

Free selection library book choices are defined as the books which students will borrow weekly from the school's Learning Center.

Learning Center is defined as the school library with an inventory of 7,190 books available for borrowing and for facilitating instruction in seventeen elementary classrooms.

Assumptions

For the purposes of this study, it was assumed that the reading Interest Category Inventory utilized was reliable and yielded accurate responses. Students were not specifically informed of the nature of the study, however they were told that they were to record book choices so that the researcher might see what kinds of books they borrowed from the Learning Center. It was assumed that the students were unaware of the relationship between the Interest Category Inventory and the free selection library book choice special record sheets.

Limitations

The study was limited by the small number of students (21) used and the brief period of time allowed to collect data of library book choices. Prior to the free choice selection recording sessions, other teachers who taught the students during the twelve week period were informed of the study and requested not to limit and/or require specific book-type reading for reports and/or extra content area assignments, so as not to influence library book choices; however, content material may have limited book choices.

Sample and Specific Procedures

A sample of twenty-one fourth grade students which included twelve boys and nine girls in the researcher's homeroom class were the subjects for the study. They attended a public school in a rural-suburban area of central

New Jersey.

The specific procedures of the study were as follows. An Interest Category Inventory was administered to each student to determine his or her expressed reading interest, as defined. The written inventory, made by the researcher, asked the subjects to indicate four choices among sixteen categories of reading. The categories, chosen to represent books available for borrowing in the school's Learning Center, included Adventure stories, Animal stories, Books About Other Lands, Fables and Fairy Tales, Famous People, Fiction, History, Hobbies, Humor, Jobs, Mysteries, Poetry, Science and Nature, Science Fiction, Series books, and Sports. Nine of these categories denoted fiction and the remainder were non-fictional. The inventory utilized directions similar to those in a study by Landy (1977) and requested the subjects to indicate the kind of reading they liked best, second best, third best, and the kind disliked most. Responses were marked with a 1, 2, 3, and X respectively. Prior to the administration of the inventory, categories were discussed to insure clarity of directions and reading types. Students were asked to make thoughtful and honest selections.

During a regularly scheduled library period of approximately forty minutes in length one day each week, students visited the school's Learning Center and were allowed, but not required, to borrow a maximum of two library books for a duration of one week. Renewals were permitted, however, if a student forgot to return his or her book on any

day, s/he was not allowed to borrow further until overdue books were returned. Every effort was made to allow students absent on the regularly scheduled day to visit the Learning Center on an alternate day during that week.

For a twelve week period during the months of October, November, and December, 1978, students were asked to record specific information about their free selection library books choices, as defined, on a special record sheet designed by the researcher (See Appendix A). The information requested included the book title, author, and call number or fictional type. Students also indicated if a book was renewed and the number of times. The researcher met individually with each student during the periods to assure correct recording of call number and fictional type. For some fictional titles, it was necessary to meet with the student after the book was read to properly classify the type. A general fiction classification was provided for those titles not able to be specified. Both the call number and/or fictional type was requested in order to facilitate the researcher later in assigning each book title to the proper interest category.

At the end of the twelve week period, the researcher assigned each of the recorded book titles to one of the sixteen Interest Inventory categories so that comparisons could be made. Results from the Interest Category Inventory and the free selection library book choice special record sheets were then compared to determine if a relationship existed

between students' expressed reading interests and their actual library book choices. Comparisons were based on the total number of free choice selections as compared with free choice in a) agreement with expressed interests; b) agreement with expressed dislike; and c) areas outside of expressed interest or dislike. Other comparisons were based on the expressed interests and dislikes of the students, as well as the type and frequency of preferences, as indicated through their free selection library book choices.

Results

The results in Table one show student responses on the Interest Category Inventory which was administered to determine three categories of expressed interest and one area of dislike among sixteen categories.

Table I

Responses on Interest Category Inventory

	FICTION										NONFICTION						
STUDENTS	Adventure-Stories	Animal Stories	Fables & Fairy tales	Fiction	Humor	Mystery	Poetry	Science Fiction	Series Books	Other Lands	Famous People	History	Hobbies	Jobs	Science & Nature	Sports
BOYS																
A	X			3							2					1
B				2						X			3			1
C			X					1	2							3
D			X			3									2	1
E			X							1					2	3
F						3	X	2								1
G				2		1			3							X
H					2			X			3					1
I	3	X									2				1	
J					3				2	X						1
K					3			1		X						2
L		3					X				2					1
GIRLS																
M	1	3				2	X									
N	2			3		1								X		
O		2				1	X									3
P	1		X			2	3									
Q	3				1				2					X		
R		1		2		3		X								
S						2	3					X				1
T		2				3		X	1							
U		3		2		1								X		

*Key: 1- Liked best, 2- Liked second best,
3- Liked third best, X- Disliked most

Table two illustrates student responses on the special record sheet and indicates the frequency of free choice library book selections as classified by the researcher according to the sixteen Interest Inventory categories. Also indicated is individual and group totals for books borrowed.

Table II

Frequency of Free Selection Library Book Choices Classified by Interest Inventory Categories

	FICTION									NONFICTION							
STUDENTS	Adventure Stories	Animal Stories	Fables & Fairy tales	Fiction	Humor	Mystery	Poetry	Science Fiction	Series Books	Other Lands	Famous People	History	Hobbies	Jobs	Science & Nature	Sports	TOTAL BOOKS
BOYS																	
A	2	1		2											3	5	13
B		1		2	6						4				1	2	16
C				1	1	1									5	1	9
D	3	1			3	1					2				2	4	16
E		1			1	1		1			2				3	2	11
F				2		1			1			1			3	5	13
G		2		1	2						2				4	3	14
H					1								1			10	12
I															17		17
J		1		1	1						1				5	3	12
K				1	5						1				5	6	18
L											3				7	2	12
GIRLS																	
M	1			4		1											6
N			1	3	1	3			1				1		1		11
O	1	1		3		2					1		1		4		13
P	1		1	2	2	1					2				1		10
Q	1	2		7		1											11
R		1		4		3									1		9
S	2	2		3		1			2		1				1		12
T	1	2	2	1	2	1					1		1			2	13
U	1	1		4		3	1	1	1						3		15
TOTAL BOOKS	13	16	4	41	25	20	1	2	5	0	20	1	4	0	66	45	263

Information obtained from the Interest Category Inventory, Table one, and the special record sheets, Table two, were analyzed and compiled as illustrated in Table three. Total free choice books were listed, totaled, and then subtotaled into three areas: those free choice selections in agreement with expressed interest; those in agree-

Table III

Frequency of Free Choice as Compared with Interest Inventory Responses

STUDENTS	Total Books Borrowed	Free Choice in Agreement with Interest	Free Choice in Agreement with Dislike	Free Choice Outside Interest and Dislike
BOYS				
A	13	7	2	4
B	16	4	0	12
C	9	1	0	8
D	16	7	0	9
E	11	5	0	6
F	13	6	0	7
G	14	1	3	10
H	12	11	0	1
I	17	17	0	0
J	12	4	0	8
K	18	11	0	7
L	12	5	0	7
GIRLS				
M	6	2	0	4
N	11	6	0	5
O	13	3	0	10
P	10	2	1	7
Q	11	1	0	10
R	9	8	0	1
S	12	1	0	11
T	13	3	0	10
U	15	8	0	7
N=21	263	113	6	144

ment with expressed dislike; and those outside expressed interest and dislike. Findings revealed that out of the total 263 books borrowed, 113 were in agreement with expressed interest, six were in agreement with expressed dislike, and 144 were books outside of expressed interest and dislike.

Correlations were computed for each of the three

areas with total free choice selections and are reported in Tables four, five, and six, respectively. Table four shows the correlation between the total free choice selections and those in agreement with expressed interest. It was found

Table IV

Correlation of Total Free Choice with Free Choice in Agreement with Interest

	M	S.D.	r
Total Free Choice Selection	12.52	2.81	.54*
Free Choice in Agreement with Interest	5.38	3.98	

*Moderately positive correlation, significant at the .01 level.

that a moderately positive correlation of .54 existed. When total free choice selections were correlated with free choice in agreement with dislike, an insignificant correlation of .06 was obtained as shown in Table five.

Table V

Correlation of Total Free Choice with Free Choice in Agreement with Dislike

	M	S.D.	r
Total Free Choice Selection	12.52	2.81	.06*
Free Choice in Agreement with Dislike	.29	.76	

*Insignificant correlation.

Total free choice selections correlated with free choice outside of expressed interest and dislike yeilded an insignificant correlation of .19 as illustrated in Table six.

Table VI

Correlation of Total Free Choice with Free Choice Outside Expressed Interest and Dislike

	M	S.D.	r
Total Free Choice Selection	12.52	2.81	.19*
Free Choice Outside of Expressed Interest and Dislike	6.86	3.28	

*Insignificant correlation

When statistical tests were applied to the mean differences of the total free choice books and those chosen in agreement with expressed interests, a t of 13.22 was computed. These results were highly significant at the .01 level of confidence and therefore could not have resulted by chance. Based on these findings, the hypothesis of an existing relationship between the fourth graders' expressed reading interests and free selection library book choices was supported. A moderately positive relationship does exist between students' expressed reading interests, as defined, and their free selection library book choices.

Findings of the specific expressed interest and dislike categories, as well as, specific free choice selections of the boys, girls, and total group were also compared. Differences were found in expressed interests and dislikes of boys and girls as illustrated in Table seven. The top interest category of boys was Sports, receiving ten responses, followed by Famous People, 4; Fiction, Humor, Mystery, Science Fiction, Series books and Science and

Table VII

Likes and Dislikes on Interest Category Inventory: Frequency by Sex

	INTEREST INVENTORY CATEGORIES	Liked best: Rated 1-2-3		Disliked most: Rated X	
		BOYS	GIRLS	BOYS	GIRLS
FICTION	Adventure Stories	1	4	1	0
	Animal Stories	1	5	1	0
	Fables & Fairy Tales	0	0	3	1
	Fiction	3	3	0	0
	Humor	3	1	0	0
	Mystery	3	8	0	0
	Poetry	0	2	2	2
	Science Fiction	3	0	1	2
	Series Books	3	2	0	0
NONFICTION	About Other Lands	1	0	3	0
	Famous People	4	0	0	0
	History	0	0	0	1
	Hobbies	1	0	0	0
	Jobs	0	0	0	3
	Science & Nature	3	0	0	0
	Sports	10	2	1	0
	Number of Possible Responses:	36	27	12	9
		BOYS N=12		GIRLS N=9	

Nature, 3. Adventure stories, Animal stories, Books About Other Lands, and Hobbies were selected only once and Fables and Fairy Tales, Poetry, History, and Jobs were never selected as areas of expressed interest. Girls' expressed interest categories were headed by Mystery, receiving eight responses, followed by Animal stories, 5; Adventure stories, 4; General Fiction, 3; Poetry, Series books, and Sports, 2;

and Humor, 1. The remaining categories were never selected. Collectively, neither the boys nor girls selected the History or Job category as an area of expressed interest.

Boys' expressed dislikes included Fables and Fairy Tales and Books About Other Lands, which received 3 responses; followed by Poetry, 2; Adventure stories, Animal stories, Science Fiction, and Sports, 1. Girls' dislikes included the categories of Jobs, 3; Poetry and Science Fiction, 2; and Fables and Fairy Tales and History, 1. Neither the boys nor the girls indicated Mystery, Famous People, nor Science and Nature as areas of expressed dislike.

Results from the special record sheets of the total groups' free selection library book choices were ranked in order of preference as illustrated in Table eight. Out of a group total of 263 free selection book choices, the top ten class preferences and frequencies were Science and Nature, selected sixty-six times; followed by Sports, 45; Fiction, 41; Humor, 25; Famous People and Mystery, both 20; Animal stories, 16; Adventure stories, 13; Series books, 5; Fables and Fairy Tales and Hobbies, both 4; and Science Fiction, 2. None of the total group of twenty-one fourth grade students selected books in the categories of Books About Other Lands nor Jobs.

Table VIII

Total Group Free Selection Library Book Choices as Classified by Interest Inventory Categories: Rank and Frequency

Order of Preference	Free Selection Library Choices as Classified by Interest Inventory Categories	Frequency of Selection
1	Science and Nature	66
2	Sports	45
3	Fiction	41
4	Humor	25
5	Famous People	20
5	Mystery	20
6	Animal Stories	16
7	Adventure Stories	13
8	Series Books	5
9	Fables and Fairy Tales	4
9	Hobbies	4
10	Science Fiction	2
11	History	1
11	Poetry	1
12	Books About Other Lands	0
12	Jobs	0
Total Number of Free Choice Selections : GROUP N=21		263

Group responses on special record sheets of free selection library book choices as classified by Interest Inventory categories were further analyzed and tabulated by sex as indicated in Tables nine and ten. Free selection choices of boys ranked in order of preference appear in Table nine.

Table IX

Free Selection Library Book Choices of Boys as Classified by Interest Inventory Categories: Rank and Frequency

Order of Preference	Boys' Free Selection Choices as Classified by Interest Inventory Categories	Frequency of Selection
1	Science and Nature	55
2	Sports	43
3	Humor	20
4	Famous People	15
5	Fiction	10
6	Animal Stories	7
7	Adventure Stories	5
8	Mystery	4
9	History	1
9	Hobbies	1
9	Series	1
9	Science Fiction	1
10	Fables and Fairy Tales	0
10	Jobs	0
10	Books About Other Lands	0
10	Poetry	0
Total Number of BOYS' Free Selection Choices:		163
BOYS N=12		

The top five preferences found among the twelve boys' 163 free selection choices were Science and Nature, selected fifty-five times, followed by Sports, 43; Humor, 20; Famous People, 15; and Fiction, 10. Science and Nature and Sports books accounted for sixty percent of the books selected by the boys. They never selected books in the categories of

Fables and Fairy Tales, Jobs, Books About Other Lands, nor Poetry. Free selection choices of girls ranked in order of preference appear in Table ten. The nine girls' top five

Table X

Free Selection Library Book Choices of Girls as Classified by Interest Inventory Categories: Rank and Frequency

Order of Preference	Girls' Free Selection Choices as Classified by Interest Inventory Categories	Frequency of Selection
1	Fiction	31
2	Mystery	16
3	Science and Nature	11
4	Animal Stories	9
5	Adventure Stories	8
6	Famous People	5
6	Humor	5
7	Fables and Fairy Tales	4
7	Series	4
8	Hobbies	3
9	Sports	2
10	Poetry	1
10	Science Fiction	1
11	Books About Other Lands	0
11	History	0
11	Jobs	0
Total Number of GIRLS' Free Selection Choices:		100
GIRLS N=9		

preferences included Fiction, selected thirty-one times; Mystery, 16; Science and Nature, 11; Animal Stories, 9; and

Adventuré stories, 8. Forty-one percent of the 100 books selected by the girls included either the Fiction or Mystery categories. Results illustrated that all but one of the girls' top five selection preferences were in fictional categories, whereas, boys' top five selection preferences included three nonfictional categories and two fictional categories.

Table eleven further illustrates the frequency of free selection choices classified into the fiction and nonfiction areas, by categories, for both the total group and sexes. Total difference in number and type of free selection

Table XI

Free Selection Library Book Choices:
Fiction and Nonfiction:
Frequency by Categories

	FICTION									NONFICTION						
STUDENTS	Adventure Stories	Animal Stories	Fables & Fairy Tales	Fiction	Humor	Mystery	Poetry	Science Fiction	Series Books	Other Lands	Famous People	History	Hobbies	Jobs	Science & Nature	Sports
BOYS	5	7	0	10	20	4	0	1	1	0	15	1	1	0	55	43
GIRLS	8	9	4	31	5	16	1	1	4	0	5	0	3	0	11	2
GROUP	13	16	4	41	25	20	1	2	5	0	20	1	4	0	66	45

choices of boys and girls, as compared to the group totals, is reported in Table twelve. Boys, N=12, were found to select sixty-two percent of the total 263 books chosen, whereas, girls, N=9, selected only thirty-eight percent of the total. Of the 163 books borrowed by the boys, eighty-five

Table XII

Free Selection Library Book Choices:
Fiction and Nonfiction:
Number and Percent

	FICTION		NONFICTION		TOTAL	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
BOYS	48	38	115	85	163	62
GIRLS	79	62	21	15	100	38
TOTAL GROUP	127	100	136	100	263	100

percent were nonfiction, while sixty-two percent of the 100 books selected by the girls were fiction in type. These results revealed that boys not only selected more books than girls, 163 as opposed to 100; but also selected more nonfiction books, 115 as opposed to twenty-one.

Conclusions and Implications

Results as revealed in Tables one through six supported the stated hypothesis of an existing relationship between the expressed reading interests and free selection library book choices of the twenty-one fourth graders. This relationship was found to be moderately positive when total free choice was correlated with free choice in agreement with expressed interest. Statistical tests indicated that these results were highly significant at the .01 level of confidence and could not have occurred by chance. Further correlations which revealed insignificant relationships between both free choice and expressed dislike, as well as, free

choice and books outside expressed interest and dislike, further supported the hypothesis.

Concluded from these results is that students chose books in categories which they said they were interested in reading about. Students also chose books in categories which were outside their expressed interest and dislike, but since they were permitted to indicate only three areas of interest and one of dislike on the Interest Category Inventory, it is not known whether these books would have been in categories of either expressed interest or dislike. However, during the administration of the Interest Category Inventory, some students did informally comment that they liked several other types of books in addition to the three allowed to be selected. Replication of this study allowing students to respond to all interest categories would be interesting and of value.

Implicated in these findings is the value of utilizing an Interest Category Inventory to ascertain students' expressed reading interests and dislikes. Such a device, used as an indicator of possible book categories which students would be interested in reading, could be an important aid to teachers and librarians in selecting book titles and types for both classroom and school libraries. Further implicated is the usefulness of an Interest Category Inventory to help determine individual book preferences to help match the reader to the literature; as well as, to determine reading interests specific to the group.

Results which indicated distinctions between the number and kinds of selections of boys and girls, as indicated in Tables seven through twelve, are interesting and of value to note. Boys selected more books than girls over the twelve week period; however, it cannot be concluded that boys read more than girls, since this information, whether the book was read, was not requested on the Special Record Sheet. Also, girls' record sheets revealed that they more frequently renewed books, two and three times. It can be concluded, however, that boys showed a great preference for nonfictional titles, especially books of Sports and Science and Nature. Conversely, girls preferred fictional titles, largely of General Fiction and Mystery. Concluded as the top book preferences of the total group were Science and Nature, Sports, Fiction, Humor, Famous People, Mystery, Animal stories, and Adventure stories. Least preferred were Books About Other Lands and Jobs. These results have important implications for the teacher and librarian, as they provide valuable information concerning the specific types of books these fourth graders prefer to select from the school library, as well as, insight for guiding and enriching students' recreational reading experiences.

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